

Heroes for Ghosts

A Heart is Made of Many Folds

Imitation is perhaps the oldest question –and a good one, spanning Plato to Deleuze to Baudrillard - as fundamental as a ruddy handprint in a cave at Lascaux operating as a portal to another world, or as Narcissus pondering his twin in a dark pool - only to fall forth into it as a starry field of flowers, atomised like a body hitting a wave to dissolve to froth and foam. Today, it ripples and reflects in the palm of a hand, and presents us with the paradox of our times - where in being more found than ever, we find ourselves somehow more lost. It's nearly impossible to tell where life recedes into art and vice versa – pronouncing an absolute indiscernibility between artifice and reality. The exhibition *Heroes for Ghosts* asks, is it possible to swim through refractive waters with a healthy dose of dialetheism, to take the collapse of the sign and inhabit it, perform it, liberate it into difference, into becoming, in performance rather than necromancy? To dive through a sea of pure simulacra, with no referent available as life buoy and make art which is alive in contradiction, as light becomes trapped between the layers of shell of the oyster to make iridescence. I do, I believe art can do that, and I believe the works in this exhibition proof.

Heroes for Ghosts, A Heart is Made of Many Folds, curated by Alex Thake - features eleven international artists in an oblique approach to the theme of imitation, found throughout the exhibition in its most psychedelic, sprawling incantations. Works which conjure, like the ghost of a dead rock star or the rock n' roll mimesis of the heart, to reveal celebrity as the impersonation of God on earth, the suggestion of art as cenotaph in its disparity with music's urgency to life, the altruistic value of counterfeit and the psychedelic reverberations of living in late capitalism, amongst other artistic interpretations. Spanning both galleries, Sangheut and SHOWER, the exhibition appears as a trampled butterfly or smudgy bifurcated Rorschach, with a through line as hard and luminescent as a band of light vibrating like the cord of a guitar - as lonely and lovely as the beat of a haunted heart.

As found in Luis Benz' theatrical models of devastation, which take history and miniaturise it, allowing us to literally grasp the enormity of politically motivated scenes of sabotage, to Rashiyyah Elanga's modification of bank notes - swapping a "hero" of antiquity with a Congolese singer, bringing the deadness of commodification back into *life*, like music, like rhythm, as we feel before we see, our first experience the drum of our mother's heart. A disco ball is made as flat as the tiled facets of a dance floor and littered with the detritus of cosplay - a wig, some glitter, a glove - all the makings of impersonation - but naturally, sometimes pretending allows us to be more truly who we are. Yooyun Yang's *Mirror ball* is parallel, and evokes a moment of rapture on the dance floor, but also of the uncanny flash of recognition of oneself on a screen. Another of Yang's work *Dummy* piles limbs of mannequins on top of each other, as spokes of a wheel, and Sam Cottington's poetic bicycle hangs high, a mechanical ghost riding to heaven. Sofia Defino Leiby makes a still life of the contemporary painter, digitally rendering bottles to evoke buildings, pulling us towards the horizon of a totalitarian Morandi. KT Hickman renders arguably the most identifiable image in the world – the Coca-Cola logo – and pushes it off the abyss of psychedelia, a scratchy abstraction hiding in the flattest, most recognisable symbol of the 21st century. Amalie

Lorentzen's characters shift between subject and object, between paranoia and manic celebration, giant faces filling the screen, confronting the viewer with the aftermath of the death of meaning – for better or worse, one narrator filled with terrible ennui and the other the unbridled joy of possibility, completing each other in turn. Her actress impersonates Lorentzen herself, inhabiting a looping world without finitude – where singing along to the radio is more real than reality itself. Daul Rheem uses advanced technology to harness the power of wind to make it sing. Hyein Min confuses the relationship between the lens and the eye, redeploying the history of the first prosthetic heart, stolen from a puppeteer's imagination to blur the binary between hard science and toy making, her narrators starting as people and collapsing into dolls. While Jiyoong Chung presents us a moment of *déjà vu* – two images nearly identical but not quite, sisters not twins – her photographs seeming to be identical, the same woman superimposed on alternative scenes – but upon close inspection we notice the images differ, as if in the most acute dream. Chung found these photographs independently of each other, but they are uncannily similar, and one would be lost to say which came first, or whether the woman in them ever really existed.

A painting by Syd Barrett occupies the last room, a gift I received from my uncle in the music business – him being a sort of techno legend in East London who knew a guy with a painting by Barrett hiding in his basement the last 20 years. Barrett, the front man of Pink Floyd – famously broke with the public and reality at the peak of his career – where after supposedly consuming too many psychedelics he became a heavy shadow of his former self – shaving off his eyebrows, gaining 30 kg and reclusing from society – withdrawing from art into life to paint pictures of landscapes and fruit in his mom's house. So who is the real Syd Barrett? The musician who could write chords just looking at his hand, or the arguably unskilled painter who made an art so true it wasn't ever intended for anyone to see?

I believe the painting exhibited is possibly a forgery, the owner too afraid to have it possessed by Syd's estate or break his own heart realising he'd been duped, as it's made on wood rather than Barrett's usual cardboard – looking at it forces a weird apophenia, the viewer getting lost in the swirls of grain to imagine other scenarios, as if seeing signs in the clouds. Either way I'm more interested in preserving the question than debunking the answer – because, living in our weird post-truth times, does it matter if it really happened? Or is it what you believe?

The title of the exhibition comes from Roger Water's ode to Barrett:

So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from Hell? Blue skies from pain?
Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil? Do you think you can tell?

Did they get you to trade your *heroes for ghosts*?

Text by Alex Thake